

Toward a Framework for Halal Education Certification: A Conceptual Proposal

Umi salamah Arya Putri¹, Muhammad Zaky Zain², Alan Robert White^{3*},

¹ Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

² Management Study Program, Faculty of Economy and Business, Universitas
Pembangunan nasional "Veteran Jawa Timur, Indonesia

³ Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, Bangkok, Thailand

* Corresponding author. E-mail address: alan.w@mail.rmuth.ac.th

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Abstract

Halal certification is a mature, standardized institution in food, cosmetics, and tourism, yet there is little research on, auditable standards that exist for "halal education" as an institutional category. This paper makes two contributions. First, it identifies and explains a specific disciplinary silo effect, the near-total non-overlap between the halal-industry certification literature and the Muslim-student-inclusion literature, that has prevented a unified halal education standard from emerging, despite both literatures independently documenting the components such a standard would require. Second, drawing on institutional theory, it proposes a seven-domain Halal Education Certification (HEC) framework, benchmarks it against existing analogous instruments (Malaysia's MS 1900:2014, JAKIM's certification manual, ISO 22000, and AAOIFI's Shariah governance standards), and outlines a validation pathway (expert Delphi panel followed by pilot institutional audit) needed before such a framework could be operationalized. The paper closes by addressing a direct counter-argument, that institutional halal certification risks functioning as an exclusionary rather than inclusive signal in pluralistic higher education, and argues this tension, rather than being resolved, should be built into the framework's governance design.

Keywords: halal certification, Islamic higher education, institutional isomorphism, Muslim student inclusion, accreditation

Introduction

"Halal tourism" is now an internationally recognized market category, supported by national tourism boards, ratings systems, and a substantial academic literature. No comparable concept exists for higher education. Institutions offering religiously accommodating environments are instead described with a patchwork of loosely overlapping terms, Islamic school, Islamic university, Muslim-friendly campus, Shariah-compliant institution, none of which corresponds to a formal, third-party-audited certification standard analogous to halal food or halal tourism certification.

This is a genuine gap, not merely an unstudied one. As this paper demonstrates, the components of a halal education standard already exist, richly documented, across two literatures that have developed almost entirely independently of one another: a product- and

governance-centered halal-certification literature, and a student-experience-centered Muslim-inclusion literature. Neither has been positioned as evidence toward an institutional certification standard, because neither uses that vocabulary.

Contribution statement. This paper is, to our knowledge, the first to (a) explicitly diagnose the disciplinary silo effect that has prevented a halal education certification standard from emerging, (b) synthesize food-certification, halal-curriculum, and Muslim-student-inclusion research into a single auditable institutional framework, and (c) benchmark that framework against existing analogous certification instruments in halal food, tourism, and Islamic finance governance. The paper is conceptual and synthetic rather than empirical; Sections 7 and 8 outline the validation work required before the proposed framework could be adopted.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is grounded primarily in institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), which explains how organizational fields converge on shared standards under coercive (regulatory), mimetic (uncertainty-driven imitation), and normative (professional) pressures. Applied here, the theory predicts, and the literature confirms, that halal food and cosmetics industries have converged on certification standards because they face *coercive* pressure from national regulators (e.g., Indonesia's BPJPH under Law No. 33/2014), while higher education institutions face no equivalent regulatory mandate and therefore no comparable convergence (Sofiana et al., 2021). This is the paper's central explanatory mechanism for the gap identified in Section 4.

Two supporting frameworks are used secondarily. Signaling theory (as operationalized by Salindal, 2019, for halal-certified firms) explains why an institution might voluntarily seek certification even absent regulatory compulsion, to reduce information asymmetry for prospective Muslim students and families, but this logic has been tested only at firm level and cannot simply be assumed to transfer to universities without empirical validation. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), used throughout the individual-level halal-consumption literature (Ma'ruf & Salamah, 2023; Yaacob et al., 2023), explains individual adoption of halal products but is explicitly not extended in this paper to institutional adoption, since organizations and individuals are different decision units with different antecedents (resource dependency, regulatory exposure, reputational risk), a distinction the existing literature does not make explicit and which this paper treats as a scope boundary rather than an oversight.

Review Method and Its Limitations

This paper is a narrative synthesis, not a systematic review, of a bounded corpus of 36 sources spanning 2019–2026, covering halal certification governance, halal curriculum integration, halal consumer/student literacy, and Muslim student inclusion in higher education. Sources were not identified through a documented database search protocol (no PRISMA flow diagram, search string, or inter-rater screening was applied), and this is disclosed here as a limitation rather than concealed. Readers should treat the synthesis in Section 5 as illustrative of a real and identifiable gap in the literature, not as an exhaustive systematic mapping of it. A genuine Q1 submission built from this paper would need to precede Section 5 with a formal systematic search (Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC; defined inclusion/exclusion criteria; dual-coder screening with a reported kappa statistic), following the model already demonstrated within the corpus itself by Saputra et al. (2025), whose PRISMA-guided SLR with JBI Critical Appraisal is the methodological benchmark this paper's future revision should meet.

Why No Prior Studies Exist on Halal Education Certification

Four structural features of the current literature jointly explain the absence of a certification framework.

The two relevant literatures rarely intersect. Halal-industry research (certification governance, food/cosmetics compliance) and Muslim-student-inclusion research (accommodation, discrimination, belonging) are published in different journal ecosystems, use different methods, and, critically, do not cite one another. Of the 36 sources reviewed, none appearing in the certification-governance cluster (e.g., Al-Mahmood & Fraser, 2023; Islam et al., 2023; Sofiana et al., 2021) cites any source from the student-inclusion cluster (e.g., Mahmud, 2024; Shaheen, 2024), or vice versa.

Existing certification standards apply to products and services, not whole institutions. HAS-23102, applied by Sucipto et al. (2021) to trace halal control points through a university canteen, evaluates menus and suppliers, not governance, curriculum, or student welfare collectively. Even where campuses pursue halal recognition, it remains confined to food procurement (Sumadi et al., 2024).

"Halal education" in the literature means curriculum content, not institutional compliance. Where the phrase appears, it denotes teaching *about* halal industries (Anam & Istiq'faroh, 2021; Andri et al., 2026; Risza, 2024; Saputra et al., 2025), not an institution's own certified compliance with halal or Shariah-compliant operating standards, a semantic drift that has effectively hidden the certification question from view.

No accrediting body has claimed institutional-level halal compliance as its mandate. Unlike halal tourism, which national tourism boards and hospitality associations adopted as shared criteria, no higher-education quality-assurance body has extended its scope to halal compliance, nor has any national halal authority (BPJPH, JAKIM) extended its scope beyond products and food-service premises to educational institutions as a whole.

Per institutional isomorphism theory, this is precisely the pattern predicted when coercive pressure (regulation) is present in one field (halal food) but absent in an adjacent one (higher education): convergence occurs where regulators compel it and stalls where they do not.

Literature Review

Halal literacy and consumer awareness:

Awareness studies converge on one point, halal knowledge is unevenly distributed and context-dependent, while diverging on explanation. Çetinkaya (2025) attributes cross-city differences among theology students in Istanbul, Berlin, and Kuala Lumpur to the interaction of individual religiosity with structural and cultural context, with Kuala Lumpur's institutionalized halal ecosystem outperforming Berlin's more secular, individualistic setting. Sannomaru et al. (2026), tracking Japanese pharmacy students from 2015 to 2020, found broad awareness of Muslim dietary restriction (~90%) but low and largely static recognition of the term "halal" itself (~30%), evidence that general cultural awareness and specific halal literacy are dissociable constructs, a distinction the wider literature rarely makes explicit.

Musa and Hashim (2022), by contrast, found no significant difference in halal awareness by gender, age, or prior Islamic schooling among Malaysian undergraduates. This null result deserves to be treated as a genuine challenge rather than smoothed over: it cuts against the implicit assumption elsewhere in this literature that religious schooling reliably produces

higher halal literacy, and suggests literacy may saturate quickly in majority-Muslim, institutionally halal-dense contexts, while remaining meaningfully variable in minority contexts such as Germany and Japan. A comparable null finding appears in the certification-decision literature: Amalia and Andni (2023) found that religiosity did not moderate the relationship between education level, halal awareness, or certification cost and MSMEs' certification decisions in Kudus Regency, a result that similarly complicates any assumption that religious commitment straightforwardly predicts halal-compliant behavior at either the individual or organizational level, and one this paper's proposed framework must reckon with directly: Domain-level compliance (Section 7) cannot be assumed to track religiosity, and audit criteria should be behavioral/structural rather than attitudinal.

None of the awareness studies, however, measures institutional literacy, administrators, procurement staff, faculty, which is the actual unit of analysis a certification framework requires. All five awareness studies in this set (Çetinkaya, 2025; Ma'ruf & Salamah, 2023; Musa & Hashim, 2022; Sannomaru et al., 2026; Yaacob et al., 2023) rely on cross-sectional, self-report surveys (n = 110–510) analyzed with basic parametric tests, which limits causal inference and means the literature currently offers no validated instrument for measuring institutional, as opposed to individual, halal compliance.

Halal certification governance:

The governance literature reveals a system still resolving basic legitimacy questions. Al-Mahmood and Fraser (2023), interviewing six of eleven U.S. halal certifying bodies, found persistent problems with forged certificates and expired logos, and active disagreement among certifiers themselves about whether a single unified standard is necessary. Islam et al. (2023), synthesizing 76 Scopus-indexed articles and applying Stakeholder Theory, extend this to a structural critique, heterogeneity, weak supply-chain oversight, and inconsistent Islamic marketing orientation are framed as systemic failures requiring multi-actor consensus among scholars, certifiers, producers, and marketers, not top-down standard-setting alone. Sofiana et al. (2021) sharpen this with a two-country comparison, finding Malaysia's certification governance more systematic than Indonesia's, whose 2020 Omnibus Law reform was itself constitutionally challenged. This is a direct cautionary case for the HEC proposal: certification legitimacy is not self-executing; it depends on stable, uncontested legal authority, something international higher education, lacking any supranational regulator, does not currently have.

Against this, Salindal's (2019) structural-equation finding that halal certification measurably improves innovative and market performance for Philippine food firms (n = 211) is the strongest quantitative evidence in the corpus that certification produces real organizational value. But it is single-country, single-sector evidence, and its innovation-mediates-performance mechanism has not been tested outside food manufacturing, let alone in education, a gap this paper flags rather than resolves.

Halal curriculum integration:

This cluster documents halal content entering curricula but remains predominantly descriptive rather than evaluative. Anam and Istiq'faroh (2021) describe curriculum-planning stages at one Indonesian university without reporting learning outcomes. Risza (2024), reviewing Indonesian universities' role in halal innovation, explicitly names this a field-wide gap, the absence of research quantifying universities' actual contribution to the halal market or the long-term outcomes of halal-focused education. Saputra et al. (2025), applying PRISMA guidelines and JBI quality appraisal to 30 articles, is the methodologically strongest study in the full corpus and the only one to apply formal quality appraisal to its sources; its call for an interdisciplinary food-ethics/Arabic-linguistics/education-

management curriculum model is conceptually rich but empirically untested. Salman et al.'s (2019a, 2019b) mixed-methods studies of Indonesian State Islamic Institutes report that 72.9% of students had studied halal concepts and 45.8% understood maqasid shariah, but these describe a single, already halal-aligned institution type. These figures cannot be read as evidence of feasibility in secular or non-Muslim-majority institutions, which is precisely the population a general certification standard would most need to serve.

Muslim student inclusion:

The largest, most heterogeneous cluster documents Muslim students' experiences of belonging, discrimination, and accommodation across the UK, Canada, Italy, the UAE, China, and continental Europe (Al-Krenawi, 2025; Chen et al., 2019; Fara, 2026; Haque et al., 2023; Mahmud, 2024; Mamati & Kovács, 2025; Mohamed & George, 2025; Mohammadi, 2023; Mohammed et al., 2025; Shaheen, 2024; Torres-Zaragoza & Llorent-Bedmar, 2024). This literature is almost entirely qualitative or mixed-methods, small-N (typically 8–30 interview participants), and geographically concentrated in the UK. Its recurring finding, that religious accommodation is inconsistent, informal, and dependent on individual staff goodwill rather than codified policy, is directly relevant here, because it identifies exactly the kind of ad hoc, non-auditable practice that certification exists to formalize. Fara's (2026) Muslim Identity Intersectional Matrix, which traces belonging as a temporal, reversible process rather than a fixed outcome, is notable for offering an analytic construct that could plausibly be adapted as a longitudinal outcome measure for HEC Domain 6, rather than treated only as a descriptive finding.

Critically, not one study in this cluster uses the word "halal" to describe institutional certification, accommodation is discussed exclusively through the vocabulary of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) or Islamophobia mitigation. This is the clearest empirical confirmation of the terminology gap argued in Section 4: the practices a halal-certified institution would need already exist in the literature, under a different disciplinary vocabulary, which is why a citation search for "halal education certification" returns nothing.

Synthesis table

Theme	Representative studies	Dominant method	Key limitation
Halal literacy/awareness	Çetinkaya (2025); Musa & Hashim (2022); Sannomaru et al. (2026)	Cross-sectional survey, ANOVA/regression	Individual-level only; no institutional measure
Certification governance	Al-Mahmood & Fraser (2023); Islam et al. (2023); Sofiana et al. (2021)	Interviews, comparative/systematic review	Product/firm-level; legitimacy contested even for food
Curriculum integration	Anam & Istiq'faroh (2021); Risza (2024); Saputra et al. (2025)	Case description, SLR	Outcomes rarely measured; self-selected institutions
Student inclusion/belonging	Fara (2026); Mahmud (2024); Torres-Zaragoza	Qualitative interview, small-N	UK-concentrated;

	& Llorent-Bedmar (2024)		never framed as "halal"
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Geographic and institutional-type skew

The evidence base is heavily concentrated in Indonesia and Malaysia for certification and curriculum research, and in the UK for inclusion research, with only isolated data points elsewhere (Japan, Canada, Italy, the US, the UAE, China, the Philippines). Practically, this means Domains 1, 2, 4, and 7 of the framework proposed below are validated mainly in Muslim-majority contexts, while Domains 3, 5, and 6 are validated mainly in Muslim-minority contexts. The HEC framework is therefore, at this stage, a synthesis across two institutional realities that have not yet been empirically tested together within a single setting, a limitation carried forward explicitly into Section 8.

Benchmarking Against Existing Analogous Standards

A certification proposal is strengthened by positioning it against real prior art rather than only against silence in the academic literature. Four existing instruments are relevant precedents:

- **MS 1900:2014 (Malaysia's Islamic Quality Management System)** integrates Shariah principles with ISO-compatible quality management, offering a template for how Shariah compliance can be layered onto an existing international management-systems standard rather than built from scratch.
- **JAKIM's halal certification manual** (Malaysia's Department of Islamic Development) provides the closest existing model of a government-backed, product- and premises-level audit process with defined renewal cycles, the closest real-world analogue to HAS-23102 discussed in Section 5.2, and a plausible template for HEC's Domains 1, 4, and 7.
- **ISO 22000 (food safety management systems)** offers a globally recognized, sector-agnostic quality-management architecture that HAS-23102 and JAKIM's manual already draw on; HEC could adopt a similar layered structure, a generic institutional quality-management shell (ISO-compatible) with a halal-specific compliance overlay, rather than inventing an entirely novel audit architecture.
- **AAOIFI Shariah governance standards** (Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions) provide the most direct precedent for *institution-level*, non-product Shariah governance, since they audit an organization's internal Shariah supervisory board, financial conduct, and governance structures rather than a single product line. This is the closest existing model for HEC Domain 4 (governance, ethics, and financial practice) and suggests HEC's certifying body should include a Shariah supervisory function analogous to AAOIFI's, rather than relying solely on a food-certification-style product audit.

None of these instruments currently extends to curriculum, student accommodation, or anti-discrimination policy (HEC Domains 2, 3, 5, 6)' confirming that the institutional governance and finance half of HEC has closer precedent than its education-specific half, which remains genuinely novel and therefore requires the validation work outlined in Section 8.

Proposed Framework: Halal Education Certification (HEC)

Drawing on Sections 5 and 6, a Halal Education Certification could be organized around seven auditable domains.

Domain 1 — Halal Food and Campus Services. Certified sourcing and halal control point traceability across canteens and vendors (Febriastuti, 2024; Oemar et al., 2020; Sucipto et al., 2021; Sumadi et al., 2024). Precedent: HAS-23102, JAKIM manual.

Domain 2 — Curriculum and Halal Literacy. Integration of halal-thayyib values and halal-industry content into relevant coursework, with periodic literacy assessment of students and staff (Andri et al., 2026; Risza, 2024; Saputra et al., 2025; Çetinkaya, 2025; Sannomaru et al., 2026). No direct precedent, novel domain.

Domain 3 — Religious Accommodation and Facilities. Prayer space, scheduling accommodation, and published accommodation policy (Chen et al., 2019; Haque et al., 2023). No direct precedent, novel domain, drawn from the EDI literature.

Domain 4 — Governance, Ethics, and Financial Practice. Shariah-compatible procurement and finance, with a Shariah supervisory function. Precedent: AAOIFI governance standards.

Domain 5 — Inclusive and Anti-Discrimination Policy. Documented, enforced anti-Islamophobia policy and staff cultural-competence training (Mahmud, 2024; Mamati & Kovács, 2025; Shaheen, 2024; Torres-Zaragoza & Llorent-Bedmar, 2024). No direct precedent, novel domain.

Domain 6 — Student Welfare and Belonging. Evidence-based mentoring, peer networks, and interfaith programming, assessed longitudinally using constructs such as Fara's (2026) belonging matrix (Al-Krenawi, 2025; Mohamed & George, 2025; Mohammadi, 2023). No direct precedent, novel domain.

Domain 7 — Vendor and Partner Compliance. Extension of halal standards to affiliated retailers and consumer goods sold on campus (Ma'ruf & Salamah, 2023; Musa & Hashim, 2022; Yaacob et al., 2023). Precedent: JAKIM manual, ISO 22000 supply-chain provisions.

Certification structure. A tiered rating (Basic, Compliant, Distinguished) is proposed, mirroring halal tourism's star system, layered onto an ISO-compatible institutional quality-management shell (Section 6), with re-certification on a fixed cycle (e.g., every three years) to account for staff turnover and curriculum change (Sucipto et al., 2021; Sumadi et al., 2024).

Certifying authority. Given the split identified in Section 6, Domains 1, 4, and 7 having clear precedent in existing halal/Shariah governance bodies, and Domains 2, 3, 5, 6 having none, a credible HEC standard would require a joint body: an existing national halal authority (BPJPH/MUI or JAKIM-equivalent) paired with a higher-education quality-assurance agency, with an AAOIFI-style Shariah supervisory board providing oversight across both halves.

Validation Strategy, Limitations, and Future Research

Validation pathway. Because HEC is proposed conceptually, two sequential empirical steps are required before adoption: (a) an expert Delphi panel, combining halal certifiers, Islamic scholars, and higher-education accreditors, to rate, refine, and reach consensus on the seven domains and their indicators; and (b) a pilot institutional audit against 2–3 willing institutions, beginning with State Islamic Institutes already shown to be halal-aligned (Salman et al., 2019a, 2019b), which would serve as a proof-of-concept ceiling case rather than a representative test, followed by piloting in at least one Muslim-minority-context institution to test Domains 3, 5, and 6 under harder conditions.

Geographic and sectoral limitations. As noted in Section 5.6, the evidence base underlying HEC is bifurcated by geography and domain, and no single study in the reviewed corpus tests governance/curriculum domains and inclusion/belonging domains within the same institution. This is the paper's central empirical limitation and the primary target of the validation work above.

Economic impact. Following Salindal (2019), future research should test whether HEC-certified institutions see measurable gains in international student recruitment, reputation, or retention, extending a firm-level finding to the institutional level for the first time.

Governance safeguards. Given documented weaknesses in existing halal certifying bodies, forged certificates, contested legal authority (Al-Mahmood & Fraser, 2023; Islam et al., 2023; Sofiana et al., 2021), any HEC body would need explicit anti-fraud and anti-capture safeguards built into its charter from the outset, not added retroactively.

Addressing a Direct Counter-Argument

A serious objection must be engaged rather than assumed away: institutional halal certification could function as an *exclusionary* rather than inclusive signal within pluralistic, secular higher education systems, marking certified institutions as religiously particular in ways that deter non-Muslim students or staff, or that pressure Muslim students toward certified institutions rather than genuine choice. This tension is real and is not resolved by the framework proposed here. Two design responses follow directly from it rather than dismissing it. First, Domains 3, 5, and 6 are deliberately framed using accommodation and anti-discrimination language consistent with general EDI practice (Haque et al., 2023; Shaheen, 2024) rather than exclusive religious provision, so that certification criteria strengthen an institution's general inclusion capacity rather than segregating Muslim students into a separate track. Second, certification is proposed as voluntary and additive, an optional signal analogous to halal tourism certification — rather than a baseline requirement, which limits (without eliminating) the risk that non-certified institutions are read as deficient for Muslim students by default. Whether this design sufficiently mitigates the exclusion risk is itself an empirical question the Delphi panel in Section 8.1 should test directly with Muslim and non-Muslim stakeholders alike, rather than one this paper can resolve by definition.

Conclusion

The absence of prior research on halal education certification reflects a genuine, diagnosable structural gap: two well-developed literatures, halal-industry certification governance and Muslim-student-inclusion research, have independently documented nearly every component such a standard would require, without ever citing one another or adopting shared vocabulary. Read through institutional isomorphism theory, this is unsurprising: coercive regulatory pressure has driven convergence in halal food and finance, while higher education, lacking an equivalent regulator, has not converged at all. The seven-domain HEC framework proposed here, benchmarked against MS 1900:2014, JAKIM's certification manual, ISO 22000, and AAOIFI's Shariah governance standards — offers a concrete, precedented starting point for four of its domains and a genuinely novel proposal for the remaining three. Its feasibility, and the exclusion risk it must be designed against, remain to be tested through the Delphi and pilot-audit process outlined above, which constitutes the necessary next phase of this research program.

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